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Register for Public Meeting to Discuss Next Steps Towards Implementing a Consent-Based Siting Process for Nuclear Waste Storage and Disposal Facilities

ECA Staff

Please find the registration information below from DOE:

The U.S Department of Energy (DOE) is implementing a consent-based siting process to establish an integrated waste management system to transport, store, and dispose of commercial spent nuclear fuel and high level defense radioactive waste. In a consent-based siting approach, DOE will work with communities, tribal governments and states across the country that express interest in hosting any of the facilities identified as part of an integrated waste management system. DOE is hosting a public meeting on **January**

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State of the Union

January 14, 2016

9:00 PM EST

Watch on

[White House website.](#)

**DOE Consent-Based
Siting Public Meeting**

January 20, 2016

1 PM - 4 PM EST

Marriott Renaissance
Washington, DC,
Downtown Hotel

20, 2016 to discuss next steps towards implementing a consent-based siting process for nuclear waste storage and disposal facilities. The agenda includes an introduction and overview of consent-based siting by DOE, discussion of 2016 Public Engagement opportunities, and a Question and Answer session.

Click here to register for the [Webcast](#).

North Dakota deep borehole test could help Hanford

Tri-City Herald

January 7, 2016

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy is preparing to drill a test borehole more than 3 miles deep in a North Dakota rock formation to study a disposal method that could be used for some of Hanford's radioactive waste.

A team led by Battelle Memorial Institute in Columbus, Ohio, has been chosen to drill the test borehole near Rugby, N.D.

"This is an important first step to increasing our scientific understanding of the the potential uses for crystalline rock formations, including the feasibility of boreholes as an option for long-term nuclear waste disposal," said Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, in a statement.

He previously has discussed deep boreholes as a promising option for disposal of 1,936 radioactive cesium and strontium capsules stored underwater in central Hanford.

The material was removed from high-level waste tanks at Hanford in 1972 to reduce the temperature of the waste inside those tanks. The waste is left from the past processing of irradiated fuel to remove plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program.

Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz in 2015 House hearing DOE plans a \$35 million, five-year project to test the boreholes on about 20 acres of state-owned land in North Dakota.

The field test will look at science and engineering challenges, including drilling techniques, stability and sealing of the drilled hole, and rock characterization deep underground.

Researchers will collect extensive data during drilling to allow for

999 9th St NW,
Washington, DC 20001
Click here to register for
the [Webcast](#).

FY17 Budget Request
February 9th, 2016

Save the Date:
DOE National Cleanup
Workshop
September 14-15, 2016
Hilton Alexandria Mark
Center
Alexandria, VA

specialized scientific testing after drilling is complete, according to DOE. No radioactive material will be used in the test project.

Scientists have discussed the possibility of disposing of radioactive weapons waste in deep boreholes since the 1970s.

The idea also came up in 2012 as the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future recommended research into using boreholes for waste that has no potential for reuse.

A DOE assessment of the option in response to the recommendation said testing would be needed to confirm safety and feasibility.

Commercial drilling technology is available. But challenges exist in the development of remote handling equipment for placing waste in the borehole, although such equipment is in the realm of current technology, the report said.

17 inches minimum diameter of borehole at 3.1 miles deep

Moniz said last year that Hanford's cesium and strontium capsules possibly could be disposed of sooner if boreholes prove a viable method.

The capsules had been planned to be sent to the proposed repository at Yucca Mountain, Nev., before the Obama administration stopped work on that facility.

The cesium and strontium capsules contain about one-third of the total radioactivity of the waste at Hanford.

However, their comparatively small total volume of less than 140 cubic feet makes them a possible candidate for deep borehole disposal. They have less than 1 percent of the projected volume of Hanford's vitrified high-level radioactive waste now held in underground tanks.

As proposed in DOE's assessment, waste would be placed in the lower 1.2-mile portion of the borehole in crystalline rock that would help isolate the waste from the environment. The borehole would need a diameter of at least 17 inches at the bottom for placing containers and would be lined with steel casing.

The test project will also be used to assess the potential for geothermal energy development.

Many regions in the United States have large, geologically stable rock formations similar to the North Dakota test site. The work there will help increase understanding of similar locations across the country, according to DOE.

DOE officials have said that they will look for communities willing to volunteer as sites for disposal of radioactive waste, whether in boreholes or by other methods.

In addition to Battelle, the research team includes the University of North Dakota Energy and Environmental Research Center of Grand Forks, N.D.; Schlumberger of Houston, Texas; and Solexperts of Switzerland.

Congressmen hint at providing funding to pay MOX fines

Aiken Standard

January 8, 2016

[LINK](#)

Congressional supporters of the nation's MOX project hinted that they might attempt to appropriate money so the Department of Energy can pay a multimillion-dollar fine to South Carolina for missing a key MOX milestone.

The MOX project would convert 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear fuel to meet an agreement with Russia, who also is responsible for disposing of the same amount of plutonium. That goal would be accomplished using the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility under construction at the Savannah River Site, among other facilities.

Either 1 metric ton of the plutonium was supposed to be processed through the SRS facility or leave the state of South Carolina before Jan. 1.

Since neither happened, DOE is supposed to pay the state of South Carolina \$1 million a day with a cap of \$100 million annually, per a 2003 agreement between the state and the Energy Department.

S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley informed U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz last month that South Carolina intends to collect the money.

The move was applauded by members of the state's congressional delegation, including U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., who said he

would support a federal appropriation to ensure DOE paid the fines.

“I would think that within the budget, it could be a line item shift,” Wilson said. “But I support anything it takes to get the attention of the Department of Energy.”

Moniz, nor the Energy Department, has responded to Haley’s letter, which was sent out Dec. 14.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., also praised Haley for attempting to levy the fines and for threatening to sue if DOE refuses to pay.

Graham authored the plutonium provision bill signed in 2003, which gave South Carolina the power to levy fines.

“I want to push very hard to enforce that statute and try to get an answer for the country and Savannah River Site,” Graham said.

A bevy of reports last year indicated that the MOX program is not sustainable, which is why other congressmen and DOE leaders are wanting to learn more about downblending – an option that would dilute the plutonium and ship it to a repository.

Another report on the downblending method is expected to surface before President Barack Obama rolls out his budget proposal, which usually surfaces in February. But Graham has consistently said there is no other pathway that would be as effective or meet the agreement with Russia.

“They have to prove to me there is a viable alternative that is cheaper. ... I don’t think they can,” Graham said.

It Was An Honor To Serve As County Council Chair

Los Alamos Daily Post

January 9, 2016

[LINK](#)

I am writing this letter to say thank you to my fellow community members, and my fellow County Councilors, for the opportunity to serve Los Alamos as the Chair of the Los Alamos County Council for 2015.

As most, but not all, of our community knows, Los Alamos is both

a city and a county, effectively, under the New Mexico Constitution; the only such entity in the State. Accordingly, rather than have both a County Commission and a City Council for the same geography - and more importantly, the same citizens - our “forefathers” in the 1960s opted for one elected body, in the form of the hybrid County Council. Each January, the Council selects a Chair.

Many of the responsibilities of the Chair are obvious - chairing the Council meetings, officiating at certain community events - and some less obvious, such as setting the Agenda for the Council meetings (with a rotating subset of Councilors and senior County staff), and representing the community in the region and in Washington, D.C.

I was honored to represent Los Alamos, this year, at the first-ever New Mexico Mayor’s Summit, in Albuquerque, as well as at the ceremony for the creation of the Valles Caldera National Preserve, and the dedication of the Ben Ray Lujan Memorial Highway, among other events.

I was also honored to lead a Los Alamos contingent in meetings with our Senators and Representatives in DC, and with many senior staff people at the NNSA, the DOE and the EPA.

As the community that hosts the most important scientific Laboratory in the nation, there are any number of issues, both at the legislative and the staff level, where decisions made in DC directly affect our lives, from continued funding for LDRD projects, to environmental cleanup and Lab contracting issues.

We also, of course, saw the creation of the new Manhattan Project National Historical Park, so we also met with the DOI and the NPS. In town, we hosted a three-city event with Hanford and Oak Ridge, the other communities involved in the Manhattan Project Park, and the NPS, DOE and DOI to work on the creation of the Park.

Los Alamos has been fortunate, this last year, to see the work of a great many people, both in the community and on past Councils, come to fruition. We have a new, beautiful library and a remodeled Teen Center in White Rock; a dedicated Teen Center on the hill, and the new PEEC Nature Center, among other things. We also opened the first Manhattan Project National Historical Park Visitor Center. I also appreciate all the hard work that the County staff put into these projects, and all the day to day work they do as well.

At the County Council's first meeting in 2016, this week, I was happy to support fellow Councilors Rick Reiss for Chair this year, and Susan O'Leary for Vice-Chair. I am sure they will do many good things for our community this upcoming year. Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve Los Alamos as County Council Chair in 2015; it was an honor.

Frank Munger: DOE delays awarding of ORISE contract

Knox News

January 8, 2016

[LINK](#)

It's not exactly clear why, but the Department of Energy is taking additional time to award a new contract for management of DOE's Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education.

Bids were submitted in September 2015, and it was anticipated that the federal agency would review the proposals, talk to the bidders and make a decision by year's end.

That didn't get done, however, and DOE extended the existing contract — held by Oak Ridge Associated Universities — through the end of June. It was due to expire at the end of 2015.

There are reportedly two bidders for the Department of Energy contract: ORAU, the incumbent, and Nevada-based Desert Research Institute.

Claire Sinclair, a spokeswoman for DOE's Oak Ridge Office of Science, confirmed the six-month contract extension but declined to discuss the reasons — except to say it would allow DOE to conduct "activities necessary to award a new contract."

CLEANUP BOOST: There's good news for the Department of Energy's environmental cleanup program.

After the dust settled on the federal budget for the rest of Fiscal Year 2016, it looks like Oak Ridge will get a significant boost in funding for cleanup activities.

Mike Koentop, executive officer of DOE's Oak Ridge Office of Environmental Management, said the Oak Ridge allotment is \$473.8 million. That's up significantly from the 2015 spending level of around \$430 million and way above the Obama

administration's initial request of about \$365 million for 2016.

"We believe it demonstrates a high level of confidence in our ability to safely, efficiently, and effectively execute the cleanup mission here," Koentop said. The added funding will enable DOE to continue making progress on cleanup priorities, as well as the historic preservation activities at the East Tennessee Technology Park (the former K-25 uranium-enrichment site), he said.

Koentop also said there's above-and-beyond funding in the 2016 budget that will let DOE tackle other projects involving higher-risk facilities in Oak Ridge and help put those facilities in a safer, more stable condition.

READY for K-27: The demolition of K-27, the last of the remaining gaseous diffusion plants that once provided uranium fuel for nuclear weapons and nuclear reactors, will apparently get started in early February.

Earlier this week, the preparations team achieved a major milestone by declaring K-27 "criticality incredible."

That means deposits of fissionable uranium have been removed or secured so there's no chance of demolition causing an uncontrolled nuclear chain reaction with a dangerous release of radiation.

New Mexico approves permit changes for troubled nuke dump

AP: Santa Fe New Mexican

January 9, 2016

[LINK](#)

ALBUQUERQUE — State regulators on Friday approved several permit changes that would affect the location of monitoring stations and air flow requirements for the ventilation system at the federal government's troubled nuclear waste dump in southeastern New Mexico.

But government watchdog groups are concerned the changes will weaken protections for workers at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant.

Officials with the New Mexico Environment Department confirmed their decision late Friday, bumping up against a deadline for ruling on proposals that were first presented last fall by the U.S. Department of Energy and the contractor that manages the plant.

The Department of Energy and the contractor have been working for nearly two years to recover from a radiation leak that contaminated the underground facility and forced its indefinite closure. They argued that it was difficult to sample the air underground for volatile organic compounds due to the contamination and sought approval from the state to move the air monitors above ground.

They also sought to eliminate required flow rates for the plant's ventilation system, given that the radiation release forced flows to be drastically reduced so the air could be filtered.

State officials said Friday this is only one of many permit modifications that would have to be considered before operations resume and that regulators made their own modifications to the proposals before signing off. They declined to identify what those changes were.

Watchdog Don Hancock of the Southwest Research and Information Center in Albuquerque told The Associated Press he was disappointed that the state seemingly rubber-stamped the proposals.

Hancock pointed to numerous permit violations by the contractor, Nuclear Waste Partnership, that were outlined by the state along with tens of millions of dollars in fines following the February 2014 radiation leak.

A settlement resolving those violations has yet to be signed, and that history should have been part of the state's consideration, he said.

"WIPP can no longer fulfill the 'Start Clean, Stay Clean' principle that is part of its essential mission, the basis for public trust, and a fundamental operating basis for the permit," Hancock said in comments submitted to the state. "Weakening permit requirements will make it even more likely that additional 'events' will occur."

Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety and other groups also opposed the changes. They said underground monitoring for various chemicals had been part of the permit for years and it was this monitoring that resulted in increased worker protections following the detection of exposures in 2009.

Katie Roberts, head of the Environment Department's Resource Protection Division, dismissed critics' concerns about weakening

protections.

“I can tell you as the lead regulatory agency for this facility, it’s our job to be protective of human health and the environment, and the changes that WIPP has proposed but also the modifications that the department has added are actually going to strengthen that sampling and monitoring program.”

Roberts said it made more sense to move the monitors so real-time measurements could be taken at the point where someone could potentially be exposed.

The changes also were backed by Carlsbad city officials and local business leaders.

WIPP to reopen in 2016, DOE official says

ABQ Journal

January 7, 2016

[LINK](#)

An Energy Department official says a southeast nuclear waste repository could reopen by the end of the year.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant has been shut to waste emplacement since an underground fire and unrelated radiation release in February 2014. WIPP is the final burial ground for certain Cold War era defense nuclear waste.

Todd Schrader, manager of DOE’s Carlsbad Field Office, said at a Carlsbad town hall meeting on Thursday that WIPP operations could restart in “late 2016.”

Jim Blankenhorn, recovery manager for site contractor Nuclear Waste Partnership, said WIPP plans a “cold start” in February in which employees will practice working under new safety regulations established in the wake of the February 2014 incidents.

They will practice new safety procedures in the underground working with empty waste containers, he said.

Investigators who reviewed the incidents came up with 143 corrective actions for NWP and CBFO before operations at WIPP could restart. Blankenhorn said NWP and CBFO have completed 121 of the corrective actions and expect to finish the rest in the next 90 days.

The corrective actions centered on improving safety, maintenance and oversight at the facility.

DOE originally estimated the recovery would cost \$500 million. A new estimate is now under review, Schrader said.

The deep underground nuclear waste repository is located outside Carlsbad.

